



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Social Policy in China: Development and Well-being

**Citation for published version:**

Hammond, DR 2008, 'Social Policy in China: Development and Well-being', *The China Quarterly*, no. 195, pp. 701-703. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741008000957>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1017/S0305741008000957](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741008000957)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

The China Quarterly

**Publisher Rights Statement:**

© Hammond, D. R. (2008). Social Policy in China: Development and Well-being. China quarterly, (195), 701-703doi: 10.1017/S0305741008000957

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



these different aspects, Zhou impressively captures much of the policy, structural and even geographic (Zhongguancun has expanded considerably in size) change that has occurred in Zhongguancun over the past three decades.

Zhou views Zhongguancun as having a quadrangle system of innovation with the state (both local and central), MNCs, local firms and educational and research institutions serving as four corners of the system. Zhou points out that the state's role should not be overestimated. She views local firms, presumably including the returnees-founded firms, as the driving force for Zhongguancun's vibrancy and future development. The state has played a role, but Zhou considers the state's best contribution as its responsiveness and tolerance for experimentation. In Zhou's nuanced account, MNCs are neither villains nor saviours. They have not dominated China's markets as some have feared. The MNCs even offer some links to the cutting-edge technology of the developed world, but their headquarters routinely discourage independence and initiative in their local operations in China, thus preventing these subsidiaries from becoming more fully embedded in the local economy. As a result, Zhou deems only local firms can be relied upon to foster innovation in China.

As good as this book is, some of the arguments could be even more robust and convincing. Firstly, on the issue of the domestic market and the development of local firms, Zhou should confront more directly the pervasive use of procurement by the Chinese state and its impact on the domestic market. The issue is that one could argue that many large local firms are living off state procurement, regardless of the particular classification of their ownership. Furthermore, the allocation of procurement does not seem to be open to true competitive bidding. Simply put, if state intervention in the domestic market is still quite pervasive in areas it deems critical, such as ICT, then one must ask if this may have a negative impact on the healthy development of capabilities among local firms. Some of the firms mentioned in the volume, such as TongFang and Ziguang, seem to this reviewer to be firmly focused on state hand-outs.

Second, the account could benefit from more hard data on the links between local firms and the export processing production chains. These links undoubtedly exist, but how deep are they and how do they differ across sub-sectors? This reviewer's suspicion is that variance in amount of utilization of export processing chains may explain much of the variance in the ability to compete with MNCs across various ICT products.

Finally, one critical note on the structure of the book is that the chapter on China's technical standards does not seem to fit well with the general examination of Zhongguancun.

These suggestions and minor criticisms do not make this book any less valuable and impressive. They are merely expressions of the hope that the author in future research will build on the data and perspective presented in this work to the benefit of all of us who are interested in issues of economic and technological development, and China's development in particular.

DOUGLAS FULLER

*Social Policy in China: Development and Well-being*

CHAK KWAN CHAN, KING LUN NGOK and DAVID PHILLIPS

Bristol: Policy Press, 2008

xiii + 234 pp. £22.99

ISBN 978-1-86134-880-7 doi:10.1017/S0305741008000957

The reform and transformation of China's social welfare provision in the post-Mao era has been well documented by scholars. These processes have attempted to deal

with the problems of growing unemployment, the ending of the iron rice bowl and expansion of the private economy. There is, however, a difference between providing a policy and dealing with the needs of those in society. It is this problem that Chan, Ngok and Phillips's *Social Policy in China: Development and Well-being* attempts to address. The book serves the dual purpose of being a textbook aimed at those with a limited background in China and/or social welfare, as well as pursuing an innovative means of analysing the social welfare reforms of the People's Republic. Using a "human well-being" framework of analysis, the authors assess the effectiveness and impact of different social welfare policies (social security, labour, health, education and housing) using eight criteria. These criteria are physical and psychological well-being, social integration, fulfilment of caring duties, human learning and development, self-determination, equal value and, finally, a just polity. The actual framework is convincingly argued by building on previous work, and this provides a wide-ranging set of criteria to assess the various policies which would challenge a welfare system anywhere in the world. This would be especially true of the more political elements such as the self-determination and just polity criteria. Following four background chapters which set out the topic and the need for the framework, the criteria form the basis of analysis for five core chapters covering each of the welfare policies mentioned above. The authors' arguments are supported by an extensive selection of primary and secondary sources in both Chinese and English, both qualitative and quantitative.

There are a number of minor concerns which emerge from the text. Firstly, given the size of the subject matter it is, at 234 pages, very short. In places it feels as though the topics at hand are being dealt with in a cursory manner. This is a difficulty in the textbook format, given that each topic could warrant a text more extensive than the one presented here, and the authors should be credited for presenting the policies and making their points concisely. It is also a shame as the innovative take on assessing the welfare reforms would warrant more detailed discussion. Perhaps a narrower choice of cases would have succeeded in providing this but at the detriment of the overall conclusions on the reform policies. Second, the use of acronyms becomes an irritation when reading the text. It is understandable that the authors sought not to alienate non-China specialists by using these conventions but to introduce new acronyms, for example for the State Council or *hukou* system, does not feel necessary. This issue is by no means limited to this particular text; the excessive number of acronyms is something that the discipline as a whole should address.

These are, however, minor issues and they do not overly detract from the book. As a textbook it provides an excellent tool for teachers of undergraduates and postgraduates who are new to either China or social welfare reform. For those who are already familiar with the topic, the text will be of more interest because of the human well-being framework used – especially the introduction of the "just polity" requirement. Assessments of welfare reforms have tended to focus on one policy at a time and measure success in terms of numbers covered and the coverage provided. Where this text adds to the discipline is by providing and then utilizing a framework which seeks to assess the impacts of welfare reforms from a perspective which encompasses both measurable issues and more abstract requirements which are of importance. It highlights the limitations of China's welfare project to date by demonstrating that although provisions are made these are not necessarily sufficient, and moreover they fail to add to the quality of people's lives. This reflects the debates which are emerging in China regarding the direction of policies such as *dibao* (minimum living standard guarantee). Chan, Ngok and Phillips have attempted a difficult balancing act and succeed in providing a very well-structured and flowing

textbook as well as an interesting addition to the debate on the direction and success of welfare reform in China.

DANIEL R. HAMMOND

*Beijing Time*

MICHAEL DUTTON, HSIU-JU STACY LO and DONG DONG WU

Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008

288 pp. £17.95; \$26.95

ISBN 978-0-674-02789-3 doi:10.1017/S0305741008000969

China's capital, Beijing, has long eluded definition, for in recent decades it has grown to become a city marked by sharp contradictions: lofty Communist ideals alongside profit-maximizing capitalist ventures, cosmopolitanism versus traditionalism, old *hutongs* (alleyways) flanking glitzy, modern skyscrapers. In *Beijing Time*, a book for popular audiences, Michael Dutton, Hsiu-ju Stacy Lo and Dong Dong Wu embark on an anthropological tour of the city to resolve its enigmatic character.

The tour begins in chapter one, titled "The square," where we are introduced to the vast expanse of Tiananmen Square – site of grand monuments and also the nation's sacred centre – and witness the daily ritual of the elite People's Armed Police raising the national flag in the early morning. According to the authors, in this mammoth space a new China was born, and from here the Chinese Communist Party has ruled the entire nation, with a unified time zone – Central (Beijing) Time. Tiananmen Square, together with its monuments created in the 1950s, especially the Monument to the People's Heroes, represents the nation's liberation from a humiliating past scarred by endless domestic violence and foreign intervention.

Beijing has undergone dramatic physical and architectural changes since the 1950s, and these are chronicled in the second chapter, "The map." Among these new installations are the Ten Great Projects constructed in 1958–59, most prominently the Great Hall of the People and the ever-expanding ring roads, now flanked by new high-rise dwellings and shopping malls prompted by the government's extensive economic reforms. The rise of market-oriented consumerism has greatly eroded Communist control and depoliticized the urban landscape.

The best way to understand the physical transformations of Beijing and the resulting changes in the character of its people, as the authors perceptively suggest, is to talk to the common people, either at their homes or in the streets. In the following four chapters of this delightful book, which are the most original, we meet a host of distinct personalities in the neighbourhoods where they live and work. Northwest of Tiananmen Square, for example, we encounter elderly women of the neighbourhood security committees, who, as committed citizens, check on door and bicycle locks to prevent crime, and we also meet a young energetic policewoman who simultaneously acts as social worker, friend, and kin to the inhabitants. These dedicated citizens all attest that, despite the changes, the venerable tradition of community spirit endures.

Though some citizens defend the city's remaining traditions, the fundamental changes that have occurred throughout Beijing have, the authors contend, engulfed the city in an infectious consumer mentality. Fast-paced, exorbitant consumption and crass materialism are readily apparent, exemplified by the ever-growing volume of garbage for recycling – with poor migrants sorting through it to survive – and a younger generation raised on pirated Western music, pursuing more individual freedom, and observing fewer laws.